

SPORT



'We want to make it special for Mash'

SPORTS REPORTER



Yesterday was the first time in Bangladesh's ongoing training camp that almost all members of the World Cup squad, except Shakib Al Hasan, practised together at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur ahead of their May 1 departure for Ireland.

Experienced wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim faced the media for the first time since returning from the New Zealand tour and he was asked about a lot of issues, including the Tigers' upcoming ICC World Cup campaign, during a twenty-minute press conference yesterday.

The followings are the excerpts of the press conference:

On his fourth World Cup appearance Not just the World Cup, it's a matter of huge pride to represent Bangladesh on the international stage and take part in a tournament. The World Cup is a big platform... we three-four players are going to play our fourth world cup and I wish to make this a memorable one and will try to reach the end. I think it's not impossible, it's tough but possible. I personally believe that we have the ability to reach the knockout

stages and anything can happen if we can reach that point. The upcoming Ireland series is very important to regroup as a unit.

Pressure or opportunity for experienced cricketers in the World Cup?

There are expectations and pressure in every international game as you are representing a nation and it's a matter of huge pride and honour. This may be our last world cup together if Mashrafe bhai is unable to play the next World Cup. So we all want to do something special, at least for Mashrafe bhai. I think it's obviously a very big opportunity to do well in the World Cup.

Youngsters taking up the challenge

If you look at our batting department we have a relatively experienced unit, but it's not just about having the experience as you also have to execute that by performing. It's a different challenge for those who will be playing the World Cup for the first time. I think they are very much capable, which they have shown in the last two-three series. If you talk about [Mohammad] Saifuddin and Fizz [Mustafizur Rahman], they have been doing well and it is a plus point for them. It's a big tournament and they need to take it a step further and take on personal challenges as match-winners emerge from such events. If we

can get one or two match-winners from here, Bangladesh can consistently perform better in the future away from home.

The batting approach keeping in mind potentially high-scoring games

I think the strike rate is very important as it's more important than how many runs you scored or your average. We have lost to England in the Champions Trophy despite posting 320 which shows that we should have scored around 350-360 and our top-order batsmen are also taking this into account. If we can score hundreds, we need to look to convert that to 130-150 in quick time and keeping the size of the boundary and ground in mind, we also need to run hard between the wickets.

His memory of first World Cup

Actually, everything went in a flash in the 2007 World Cup. I was excited about when I would play as I was very young then and it was a big stage with all the great players. When you are playing against Sachin Tendulkar, Brian Lara, Ricky Ponting and the game is telecast on TV, those things were fascinating. But those who will be playing for the first time now are quite mature and apart from Abu Jayed, almost all have played quite a few international matches. It's important to enjoy the game.

Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim is about to take a catch during the Tigers' training camp ahead of the tri-series in Ireland against the hosts and West Indies at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB



'I'm hungry to represent WI'

REUTERS, Mumbai

Andre Russell has represented West Indies in only a single one-day international since 2015 but his World Cup call-up was not surprising and the hard-hitting all-rounder is hungry to represent the Caribbean side again.

Contractual disputes between the players and Cricket West Indies have weakened the team for several years now with the frosty relations famously culminating in the 2014 tour of India being called off midway through the series.

There have been signs of a thaw recently, however, with a new leadership team in place at the board and the twice 50-over World Cup champions have included former captain Chris Gayle and Russell in their 15-man squad.

"I wasn't surprised that I was a part of the World Cup squad," Russell told reporters ahead of KKR's home match against the Mumbai Indians at the Eden Gardens.

"I've been doing well, I've been back and forth with the selectors and the coaches back home. I know once I'm doing my work here and performing, that will lead to national duties."

"I wasn't really focused on the World Cup. I was just trying to make sure that whatever happened here, I did my best and put my best foot forward."

Russell, who also bowls medium pace, is averaging 58 with the bat and has smashed 42 sixes during the 2019 edition of the IPL - 10 more than closest rival Gayle, who plays for the King's XI Punjab.

Russell hopes he can continue his form into the May 30-July 14 World Cup, where the 1975 and 1979 champions open their campaign against Pakistan in Nottingham.

"I'm so hungry now to represent the West Indies," said Russell, who played for West Indies against Bangladesh last July in an ODI for the first time since November, 2015.



ANDRE RUSSELL

SAKEB SUBHAN



It is quite unfortunate that there is no provision to include pictures with headlines, because this one really should have been flanked by laughing emojis as Bangladesh's squad selection has become little more than a joke.

The Tigers are now taking 19 players to Ireland for next month's tri-series, and the two latest entrants are at opposite ends of the spectrum of farcical selection decisions. There will be celebrations in the households of Taskin Ahmed -- who was in tears in front of reporters after originally being left out of the World Cup and tri-series squads on April 16 -- and Forhad Reza, who played the last of his 34 ODIs for Bangladesh in December 2011.

These two decisions, for different reasons, are proof positive that there is very little in the way of actual planning -- long-term or short -- behind the decisions of chief selector Minhajul Abedin and Habibul Bashar.

Taskin had recently recovered from an injury and was in line to be picked for the World Cup squad, which would have seen him in the Tigers' ODI dugout for the first time since October 2017. However, Minhajul said while announcing the squad that there were still doubts over his match fitness. That led to dramatic tears, and Taskin played for Legends of Rugganj in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL), his claim to recent fame being an expensive four-for.

If the selectors were thinking of testing Taskin's match-fitness in the DPL -- let us decisively start ignoring soundbites like 'performances in the DPL do not count toward national selection' -- why not include him in the Ireland squad anyway? Yasir Ali and Naeem Hasan are two cricketers who are not part of the

WHO'S NEXT?



Being left out of Bangladesh's World Cup squad may have reduced Taskin Ahmed (L) to tears but the pacer was all smiles yesterday during a training camp in Mirpur as he was included in the Tigers' squad for the tri-series in Ireland. It remains to be seen whether captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (Inset) will be welcoming more additions.

PHOTO: BCB

15-man World Cup squad but going to Ireland as extra options.

So, someone like Taskin, who would have been expected to regain fitness soon enough, was a no brainer contingent upon his recovery. Instead, it took public words of support from bowling coach Courtney Walsh, a social media and -- in some cases -- news media campaign, as well as Taskin's tears to suddenly change the wise minds.

Forhad is another matter however. He is 32 years old and has been one of the regular performers in domestic cricket. He may end up a domestic colossus similar to what Tushar Imran and Abdur Razzak have become, but he has not set the world alight in domestic

competition. He did put in a good all-round show in the just-concluded DPL and was high up on the wickets charts, but it honestly has to be asked whether it was enough to look back at someone who could be said to be past his prime.

There is also the question of whether a medium pace-bowling all-rounder is needed. The main choice for the position, Mohammad Saifuddin, is nursing tennis elbow but has excelled in the DPL in that condition. Soumya Sarkar has become good enough with the ball to bowl five overs. In the unlikely scenario that they need a third option, why someone who has not been in and around the team since playing a T20I against Sri Lanka in 2014?

The selectors often like to pretend that options are thin on the ground, but the case may actually be that they do not remember all the options. Not long ago, Ariful Haque was the choice for the seam-bowling all-rounder's role. He is also an excellent fielder. With due respect to Forhad, it makes much more sense to have one of the best fielders in the country as an option to come on as 12th man, which seems to be what Forhad is destined to be.

This level of planning, as it has become plain to see, is however beyond the selectors. Instead of hoping for analytical thought on their parts, it's much better to grab some popcorn and ask: who's next?

Hitting fan was a mistake: Neymar

AFP, Paris

Brazilian superstar Neymar accepted on Sunday that he had made a mistake striking a fan who insulted PSG players as they were collecting their French Cup losers' medals.

Neymar scored to put PSG 2-0 up after 21 minutes on Saturday, but Rennes fought back to tie the game at 2-2 and win the penalty shootout 6-5 after extra time.

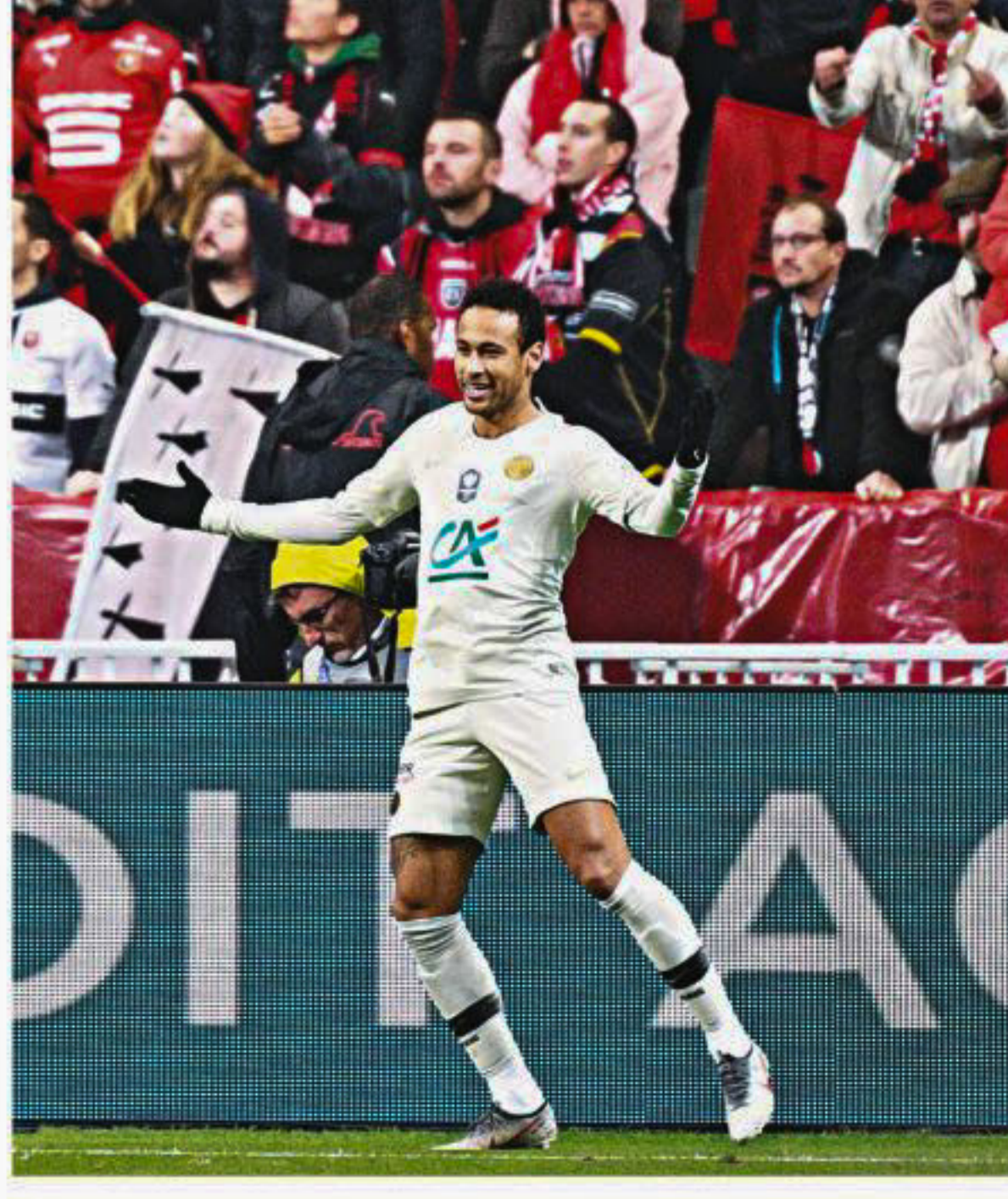
As the players climbed the steps to receive their medals, Neymar, one of the last in line, struck one of the fans in the face. The blow was caught on numerous phones, including that of the victim, Edouard, a 28-year-old delivery driver from Nantes.

"Did I act badly?" Neymar asked in an Instagram comment. "Yes. But no one can stay indifferent."

A Brazilian friend of Neymar's, Alex Bernardo, posted on Instagram a transcript of the comments audible on Edouard's video. "Oh, Buffon, dirty Buffon! Oh, Kurzawa, keep your hand to yourself!" Then to Marco Verratti: "Oh, racist!" and to Neymar: "Oh, go and learn to play football."

The Brazilian striker reacted by pushing down the phone to hit Edouard in the face.

"Who will defend me from going in defence of my teammates?" Neymar wrote in a comment on the post.



Neymar's first start for PSG since returning from injury began well as he scored a goal, but soured quickly as his side was defeated before the Brazilian threw a punch at a supporter on Saturday night.

PHOTO: AFP

Krishna, Swapna doubtful for semifinal

SPORTS REPORTER



Hosts Bangladesh received a big blow ahead of their semifinal match against Mongolia as the striking pair of Sirat Jahan Swapna and Krishna Rani Sarkar are likely to miss the match today.

Despite getting a lot of scoring chances against United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh only managed to score four goals, with Krishna scoring two goals and Swapna scoring one.

However, both first-choice strikers limped out with knee injuries during the match Kyrgyzstan on Friday and are currently in rehabilitation.

"There is little chance of getting Krishna and Swapna in the semifinal [against Mongolia] as they are in rehabilitation programme. MRI's have already been done and we are waiting for the report which we are

supposed to get tonight," informed Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton.

"The depth of the injury to Swapna is more than that of Krishna and only time will tell whether they will be available for the semifinal," said Choton.

Swapna sustained an injury in her right knee in a collision with the Kyrgyzstan goalkeeper in the first half while Krishna received a rough tackle on her right knee by a Kyrgyz defender in the second half.

What's worrying is that both these strikers are apparently irreplaceable even though the team management is hopeful that Marzia and Tahura Khatun will be good replacements.

"The way Marzia and Tahura played in the last match coming on as substitutes, we are optimistic that there will be no problem if Krishna and Swapna miss the match. However,

it is undoubtedly true that Krishna and Swapna are very important players in our squad," said the coach.

"Previously in different tournaments our substitutes did not let us realise the absence of first-eleven players. We will be hoping that the rest of the players will fulfil the vacuum left by the injured players," added Choton.

The coach is also hopeful that whoever plays as forwards will not repeat the mistakes made in the first two matches and the team would leave the field with a victory against Mongolia.

"The semifinal is a knock-out game, so there is no alternative but to win. I think Mongolia are a good side and they are equal in strength to Kyrgyzstan and UAE. I believe the girls will give the same effort they put in the first two matches and give their best to win the match," Choton said.